

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 31, 2023

The Honorable Lou Bono
Senior Advisor for Caucasus Negotiations
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Senior Advisor Bono:

Congratulations on your appointment as Senior Advisor for Caucasus Negotiations at the Department. As you know, we are at an inflection point for the region, Armenia and Artsakh.

As such, it is imperative that we leverage every opportunity to reiterate strong United States engagement to ensure a swift end to Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin Corridor and lasting peace in the region. Your appointment and visit to the region this month sent an important signal that the United States is still engaged and wants to play a critical role in ending the conflict.

However, we are deeply concerned by your reported comments during the trip ruling out the use of economic and diplomatic sanctions against Azerbaijan for their clear aggression. It was reported that you stated, "this is not a time for sanctions ... it's not even under consideration at this point."¹ As 120,000 innocent people remain deprived of their basic rights in Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) for a third month, due to a blockade that the International Court of Justice (World Court) has ordered Azerbaijan to lift,² this is not the time to take any tools off the table.

Since December 12, 2022, Azerbaijan has imposed a blockade of the Lachin Corridor, the only road connecting Artsakh to Armenia. The effect has been devastating to the population, rendering 120,000 individuals without access to food, medical supplies, consistent gas and electricity, and essential human rights such as freedom of movement. Tens of thousands have been left without heating amid plummeting winter temperatures, which forced schools to close and deprived children of access to education. Plainly speaking, it's a humanitarian disaster.

Azerbaijan is once again weaponizing basic human necessities to further degrade already strained living conditions for the Armenians living in Artsakh. Despite the February 22 World Court decision ordering Azerbaijan to "take all measures at its disposal to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions,"³ Azerbaijan continues to try to leverage this humanitarian crisis of its own making to seek concessions from Armenia.

Azerbaijan's actions are a direct violation of the trilateral ceasefire statement of November 9, 2020⁴, which outlines an obligation to guarantee the secure movement of citizens, vehicles, and cargo in both directions through the Lachin Corridor. The events of March 5, when Azerbaijani armed forces attacked a Nagorno-Karabakh police passport and visa directorate patrol car, killing three officers and wounding another, further underscore the need to end the blockade immediately and hold Azerbaijan accountable.

¹ <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32308629.html>

² <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/world-court-orders-azerbaijan-ensure-free-passage-through-lachin-corridor-2023-02-22/>

³ <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/180/180-20230222-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>

⁴ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/307/34/PDF/N2030734.pdf?OpenElement>

These are only the most recent examples of Azerbaijan's belligerence, which has followed a well-documented pattern of war and provocation against Armenia and Artsakh, motivated by the bombastic rhetoric of President Aliyev and his regime. We have long passed the time for continued appeasement of Azerbaijan.

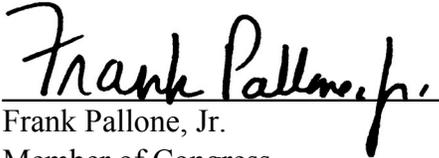
The United States, the President of the United States, the U.S. State Department and entire Administration must use all tools at its disposal to ensure the safety of the people of Artsakh, now and in the future, including cessation of financial support to Azerbaijan and imposition of sanctions.

We cannot allow Azerbaijan's policy of aggression and intimidation to continue.

Sincerely,


Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress


Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress


Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress


Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

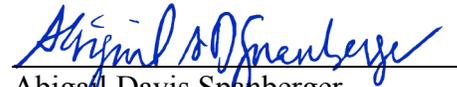

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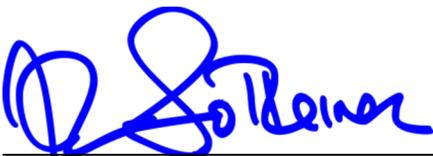
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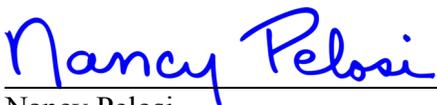
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